

# Our Boys and Girls

## THE CHOICE.

"Hi, bundle; where are you going with that boy?"

A great white bundle, surmounted by a round, boyish face and shaded by a man's old Stetson hat, was struggling through the half-open screen door. The white-aproned young meat-cutter came from behind his counter to take the bundle, and the three elderly men seated in cane-bottom chairs at one side of the shop regarded the newcomer with interest. His clothes were those of a man, but they had been cut down until they fitted for practical purposes; he wore one boot and one shoe. Though full of holes and patches, the boy's clothes were clean, and his catfish mouth wore a smile that was cheerful and independent.

"What's your name, son?" asked Bean, the oldest of the three spectators, a big fellow with a white moustache and kind, keen, dark eyes.

"Buck Holler."

"Where do you live?"

"In a sort of a shack we built on the right o' way."

"And why ain't you in school these bright days?"

"I ain't never been to school."

"Can't you read?"

The smile faded as the boy slowly shook his head. In the meantime the meat-cutter had been wrapping up several large bones and some scraps of meat. He handed this package to the boy, who took it and went out. As soon as the door had closed behind him, Morse, a scrap of a man with a grizzled, pointed beard and a severe expression, said:

"That's old Bill Holler's boy."

"I didn't know old Bill was ever married," said Bean.

"Well, he is, and she is a big, fat, clean-looking woman. She was in here the other day making arrangements to do the shop's washing for her meat."

"What kind of a house have they built on the right o' way?"

"Oh, just a sort of a den of railroad ties, covered with pieces of tin. A miserable place for a woman, but I reckon it keeps out the most of the rain."

"Let's see," put in the third man, a genial red-bearded fellow whose name was Edwards. "How long has Bill Holler been gone from here?"

"Seven years," put in Morse. "I remember him a-passing my house in his wagon the day Jim Thornton was killed."

"This boy looks to be about ten; he must a-been a little feller then."

"Seems to me I remember seeing a little tow head sticking out of the wagon."

"Old Bill was about half drunk yesterday," volunteered the meat-cutter.

"He'll be in jail before the month's out," foretold Morse.

"And better off," declared Edwards.

"That's a terrible life for his folks," mused Bean. "This little boy, now, looks like he might amount to something if he had a chance."

In the days that followed the boy was often in the shop, and as the three men spent their leisure there, they saw him frequently. He was always clean, cheerful and attentive to business. Bean had many a kind word for

him, and the two seemed to become friends.

"Son," said the man one day, "some time you are going to be a man. Are you going to be a man that can't read a newspaper or write his name?" The boy blushed and hung his head. Bean had often spoken along this line, but never so broadly as this. "I want to make you a proposition," he continued. "It is just sixty days till Christmas. Now, if by that time you learn to read the easy sentences in this little book, and to write your name, me and Morse and Edwards here will give you a new pair of shoes or a hat or a knife or any small-like thing not to exceed the value of one of these. Maybe you'd rather pick out something yourself. Is it a go?"

The boy's eyes sparkled.

"Sure," he replied, eagerly. "It looks hard, but I'm willing to tackle it. Can I take the book?"

"Yes, it's for you. You'll have to begin with the letters, but I reckon your ma can help you with 'em. Bring the book back on Christmas Eve, show us what you can do, and name your prize."

"I'll be here," declared Buck.

As the days wore on, the men often asked the boy about his progress.

"I'm still a-studying," he would reply. "I'm sure going to be with you Christmas Eve."

The men in the shop often ran out of problems for conversational solution. On several of these occasions they amused themselves by speculating as to the boy's choice of a reward.

"He'll take the knife," declared Morse.

"In my opinion it'll be the hat," said Edwards.

"He seems like a right sensible boy," remarked Bean. "I'm thinking he'll take the shoes. His won't last much longer."

"He may take something none of you are thinking of," said the meat-cutter, who had hitherto been silent.

Soon after this Bean undertook to sound the boy himself on the subject.

"I dunno that I've rightly made up my mind," he replied, slowly. "The knife looks pretty good, but so does the shoes and the hat. There's a lot o' difference in folks. If it was my little sister, now, she'd take a doll," and Buck would never come any nearer than that in committing himself to a decision.

On the morning of Christmas Eve the boy was on hand with his book. The three men were also ready. The satisfactory tests were soon applied and passed. And now the great moment was come.

"What shall we give you, son?" asked Bean, Buck though slightly embarrassed, was determined.

"I want a doll—for my little sister."

The silence lasted till he asked apprehensively:

"Is it all right? Do I get it?"

"You get it, son," declared Bean, with emphasis.

"Sure you get it," boomed Edwards.

"For a fact," chimed in Morse.

He received more. The little story was widely circulated, and many who heard it contributed to the Holler's Christmas. There was a new suit, hat and shoes for Buck, and a knife as well. The little sister's doll was dressed by Mrs. Bean, and Christmas goodies were provided for the family. But the most

lasting result of Buck's choice was recorded in a remark of Mr. Bean.

"That boy is the right kind," he said. "I'm going to keep an eye on him, and help him to make something of himself."

## JOHN 3:16.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

One cold, wintry night a poor Irish boy stood in the streets of Dublin—a little city Arab, homeless, houseless, friendless.

He had taken to bad courses, and become an associate of thieves, who were leading him on the broad road to destruction. That very night they had planned to commit a burglary, and appointed him to meet them in a certain street at a certain hour.

As he stood there, waiting, shivering and cold, a hand was suddenly laid on his shoulder. It was very dark, he could only see a tall form standing by him, and he trembled with fear; but a kindly voice said: "Boy, what are you doing here at this time at night? Such as you have no business in the streets at so late an hour. Go home. Go to bed."

"I have no home and no bed to go to."

"That's very sad, poor fellow! Would you go to a home and to a bed if I provided one?"

"That I would, sharp!" replied the boy.

"Well, in such a street and at such a number (indicating the place) you will find a bed." Before he could add more, the lad started off. "Stop!" said the voice; "how are you going to get in? You need a pass; no one can get in there without a pass. Here is one for you—can you read?"

"No, sir."

"Well, remember that the pass is 'John 3:16;' don't forget, or they won't let you in: 'John 3:16.' There, that's something that will do you good."

Joyfully the lad rushed off repeating his lesson, and soon was in the street and at the number indicated, before a pair of large iron gates. Then his heart failed him, they looked so grand. How could he get in there? Timidly he rang the bell. The night porter opened, and in a gruff voice asked, "Who's there?" Me, sir. Please, sir, I'm John Three Sixteen," in very trembling tones. "All right; in with you, that's the pass," and in the boy went.

He was soon in a nice warm bed, and between sheets such as he had never seen before. As he curled himself up to go to sleep he thought, "That's a lucky name, I'll stick to it!" The next morning he was given a bowl of hot bread and milk, before being sent out into the street (for this house was only for a night). He wandered on and on, fearing of meeting his old companions, thinking over his new name; when heedlessly, crossing a crowded thoroughfare, he was run over.

A crowd collected; the unconscious form was placed on a shutter and carried to the nearest hospital. He revived as they entered.

It is usual in the Dublin hospitals to put down the religion, as well as the name and address of those admitted. They asked him whether he was a Catholic or Protestant. Sure, he didn't quite now. Yesterday he was a Catholic, but now he was John Three Sixteen. This reply elicited a laugh.

After his injuries had been attended to, he was carried up into the accident ward. In a short time his sufferings brought on fever and delirium. Then was heard in ringing tones, and oft repeated, "John 3:16. It was to do me good, and so it has!"

These persistent cries aroused the other pa-